

March 23, 2006

The Honorable Bob Ney, Chairman
Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity
US House of Representatives
2129 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Ney:

For the invitation and opportunity to testify today, to you and the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity, at this field hearing titled “Strengthening Rural Ohio: A Review of the Community Development Block Grant Program”, I thank you for the privilege.

I testify to express my comments and those of the Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association’s (OMEGA) Board and to seek your consideration and support to fully restore funding for HUD’s Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) to the FY2004 level of 4.3 billion dollars. In addition, we ask that you and the Committee support retaining the original mission of the program as a flexible, locally driven program that provides valuable assistance to County Commissioners, mayors and development directors working to improve local community and economic development initiatives.

As Executive Director of OMEGA, I represent an organization that serves as a Council of Governments (COG), a Local Development District (LDD) and an Economic Development District (EDD) serving a ten-county region with a population of 593,221 residents in eastern Ohio.

At our most recent Annual Board meeting, 92 officials, including Commissioners, mayors, county engineers, development officials, tourism officials and private business leaders spoke of the critical importance of continuing funding for the CDBG program. At our March 22, 2006 OMEGA Executive Board meeting, we held discussion on this

hearing and our Board in its entirety requested your full support of this most important program.

As a former development director in Belmont County, Ohio, I have had the privilege of working with you when you were State Senator and later on when you became a United State Congressman on three (3) separate development projects and they were: the 80 million dollar Ohio Coatings Electrolyte Tin Plating Plant, the Shadyside Stamping Mayflower Plant at 32 million dollars and the Belmont Correctional Institution built at a cost of 38 million dollars. These three (3) development projects were built at a cost of 150 million dollars and when I left Belmont County in 2001, these three (3) development projects had approximately 900 employees with an annual payroll and benefit package of over 35 million dollars. Belmont County and its people benefit today because of those developments. These projects could not have happened had it not been for the CDBG program and others like it.

Records that we have in the OMEGA office for the year 2004 report the OMEGA region received \$200,654 for three (3) housing grants, \$3,015,000 for 15 county and city formula grants, \$885,000 for two (2) water and sewer grants and \$5,839,000 for 12 CHIP grants. These CDBG grants are so important to our region and the individual counties and cities that they benefit.

Our infrastructure needs are many not only here but also throughout the country. Last summer the American Society of Civil Engineers prepared a report which addresses 12 categories of infrastructure that gives the nation's transportation, water and energy system an overall grade of "D" plus. Both drinking water and wastewater received a grade of "D". The report states the nation's 54,000 drinking water systems are aging rapidly and some sewer systems are 100 years old. We need quality programs like CDBG that address these issues of concern and importance.

You have done much for the people of Ohio and for economically disadvantaged citizens throughout the United States. We ask that you continue to look out for those in need and in the shadows of life. With a sluggish economy and three (3) major floods that occurred recently, out 10 member counties need your help and that of Congress more than ever. We ask that you support this quality program and restore funding of the CDBG program to the FY2004 level of 4.3 billions dollars.

We thank you for your consideration of this report and for all that you do for the OMEGA region.

Respectfully Submitted,

Donald R. Myers